DRAFT STATEMENT FOR RESPONDING TO MEDIA INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE FINLAND CONSUMER COMPLAINT BOARD

The statement issued by the Finland Consumer Complaint Board is not a legal ruling and has no legal effect in Finland or anywhere else. It is merely an opinion by a consumer advisory group, issued at the request of a Finnish lawyer engaged in an anti-smoking publicity campaign. It certainly has no legal effect on litigation involving R. J. Reynolds, or any other tobacco company.

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The Finnish lawyer has also brought a lawsuit against two Finnish companies. Under the Finnish courts' procedures, those companies have not yet had the opportunity to present their evidence. Midway through the lawsuit and before the defense has been presented, the Finnish lawyer asked the Board to issue a statement based solely on his arguments, circumventing the pending court proceedings. Contrary to basic principles of fairness, the Board issued its statement, which acknowledges it is based on only one side of the story. Significantly, the Board's statement fails to recognize, or even consider, the many court rulings around the world that reject its conclusions.

We understand the presentation of the Finnish tobacco companies' defense to the court will begin next year. We are fully confident that under Finnish law, as in other countries, the plaintiffs' claims will be rejected at the conclusion of the proceedings.

Optional:

Prior to filing the lawsuit, the Finnish lawyer acknowledged in writing that his suit would "certainly fail." The statement should be clearly recognized for what it is: a desperation tactic in a losing case.

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